

STATEMENT OF JANET SNYDER MATTHEWS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR CULTURAL RESOURCES, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERALISM AND THE CENSUS, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM ON “HISTORIC PRESERVATION VS. KATRINA: WHAT ROLE SHOULD FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS PLAY IN PRESERVING HISTORIC PROPERTIES AFFECTED BY THIS CATASTROPHIC STORM?”

November 1, 2005

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present information on the role of the National Park Service (NPS) in working with other Federal, State and local governments to preserve historic properties affected by Hurricane Katrina.

The National Park Service is the lead Federal agency in historic preservation for the Federal Government, coordinating several programs documenting and preserving our Nation’s cultural heritage. In 1966, the National Register of Historic Places was established to document districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects, with national, state, and local significance.

Approximately 3 percent of the sites on the National Register have been designated National Historic Landmarks.

Since 1933, the Historic American Buildings Survey has documented historic buildings in the United States; since 1969, the Historic American Engineering Record has recorded significant engineering and industrial sites; and since 2000, the Historic American Landscapes Survey has documented landscapes (HABS/HAER/HALS). Since 1992, the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT) in Natchitoches, Louisiana, has been advancing the use of science and technology in historic preservation through training, grants, education,

research, technology transfer, and partnerships. Following Hurricane Katrina, these offices responded by providing documentation and information readily accessible to State governments in the affected areas.

From southeastern Louisiana to Mobile Bay, Hurricane Katrina damaged and destroyed historic buildings and sites associated with over 300 years of American history. The Gulf Coast has long been recognized for its unique blend of French Creole, Anglo-American, and African American cultures. The Creole influences that predominated during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries played a central role in creating some of the most distinctive architecture in North America. It will be months before the full extent of the damage is known, but already it is clear that the storm took a heavy toll on the heritage and historic fabric of the Gulf Coast.

Damage was severe along the coast of Mississippi. The town of Biloxi, which became a popular coastal resort in the mid-nineteenth century and emerged in the early twentieth century as a leading seafood canning center, suffered immeasurable losses. The towns of Ocean Springs and Pass Christian were especially hard hit.

In New Orleans, a remarkable number of the city's landmarks made it through the storm with only minor damage. The famed French Quarter, the original portion of the city that today represents the largest concentration of urban Creole architecture in the United States, escaped largely unscathed as did the Garden District, the residential neighborhood known for its grand mansions and tree-lined boulevards. Katrina wreaked havoc on many other historic properties in

the city, however. The sweeping destruction of vernacular architecture, for which New Orleans is internationally known, represents a loss of incalculable proportions.

In Alabama, the communities of Bayou La Batre and Coden, both of which trace their origins to the French colonial era, suffered extensive losses and damage. In Mobile, flooding damaged several prominent historic buildings and affected two historic vessels permanently moored in Mobile Bay.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the cultural resources programs staff of the NPS has responded with guidance on recovery and stabilization of sites, structures, and objects in the impacted areas. NPS has provided extensive site documentation, technical information, and training; developed new tools specifically to meet the needs of the states; and provided limited on-site assistance. Many NPS cultural resources specialists stand ready to respond and some have been called to assist in the affected areas. NPS has provided these services in collaboration with other Federal and non-Federal partners, such as FEMA and the Heritage Emergency National Task Force. This task force is a coalition of Federal and State agencies and non-governmental organizations that is sponsored by the nonprofit Heritage Preservation and FEMA.

I would like to share with you some examples of the NPS response to Hurricane Katrina.

Under the National Response Plan, the Department of the Interior (DOI) is the initial lead agency for the Natural and Cultural Resources and Historic Properties Protection (NCH) component of Emergency Support Function #11 (ESF #11), Agricultural and Natural Resources. Other

agencies with leading roles under the NCH part of ESF #11 are the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). NPS is serving as the coordinator for the cultural resources component of the NCH response during the current hurricane season. The procedure we have followed is that FEMA requests assistance from the NCH part of ESF #11, and the participating agencies collaborate to respond. Bureaus that have volunteered staff in response to FEMA requests for cultural resources expertise include, at DOI, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service and, at USDA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Services Administration. The lead agencies for the NCH part of ESF #11 may, as necessary, call upon other Federal agencies to assist in a response. In response to FEMA requests, NPS has provided staff assistance for FEMA headquarters, the National Response Coordination Center, and the Louisiana and Mississippi Joint Field Offices (JFO).

The National Park Service established a list of 120 NPS employees who volunteered with a wide range of natural and cultural resources expertise who are available immediately to serve. The list includes 78 with cultural resources expertise, and 66 experienced with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 106. The cultural resources skills identified as needed by FEMA included historical architects, historic preservation specialists, architectural historians, archeologists, historic preservation trainers, collections management specialists, historic building technology experts, and historic preservation generalists. To date, NPS has provided one NHPA specialist, three archeologists, one historic preservation generalist, two historical architects, and two collections management specialists. Additional FEMA requests are expected.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the NPS pre-positioned incident management teams for rapid response to NPS sites and to assist communities and other agencies in the impacted area. Once the areas were secured, NPS deployed historic preservation specialists and museum specialists, including the National Capital Region's Museum Emergency Response Team, to the affected sites. These teams assessed damage to historic structures at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, Gulf Islands National Seashore, and Dry Tortugas National Park; evacuated threatened and flooded park museum collections at Jean Lafitte and Gulf Islands; stabilized museum collections damaged by flooding, storm surge, and/or wind at Chalmette Battlefield, Gulf Islands, and Dry Tortugas National Park; and provided archeological salvage for human remains unearthed by fallen trees at Chalmette National Cemetery. These teams have completed their assessment and stabilization actions, and the park staffs are now managing the long-term recovery effort.

The National Park Service is proud of the rapid and overwhelming response of its employees to this emergency in all areas of need, including historic preservation. NPS stands ready to provide further response as called upon by FEMA under the National Response Plan.

Also, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and other participants on the Heritage Emergency National Task Force, NPS has initiated several actions to provide technical assistance, primarily via the web.

The National Center for Preservation Technology and Training (NCPTT) added hurricane technical assistance to its home page, www.ncptt.gov, and provided links to NPS sites and other information. The NCPTT web site is a primary national information resource. NPS provides

direct links to this page at <http://www.nps.gov/katrina/>, where NPS posts all information on hurricane response and recovery. NCPTT worked with FEMA, the affected States, and other preservation partners to design a Rapid Building and Site Condition Assessment form and a Detailed Building and Site Condition Assessment form, an instruction guide, a glossary, and related tools and guidance. NCPTT developed companion databases for related data collection also accessible at www.ncptt.gov. NCPTT is preparing a guidance document stating the best practices and concerns inherent in the survey of impacted cultural resources.

The NPS Cultural Resources Geographic Information Systems Facility (CRGIS) provided maps of National Register Historic districts in the impacted areas to the Mississippi and Louisiana SHPOs for use by FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers to help protect the districts from demolition. CRGIS is working on similar maps for Alabama. CRGIS arranged to have Geographic Information Systems licenses installed for the Mississippi and Louisiana SHPOs to assist in this work.

The National Register of Historic Places compiled information on National Register listings in the Gulf Coast areas impacted by Katrina and Rita for posting on the NCPTT web site.

HABS/HAER/HALS provided data on existing documentation for sites in the impacted areas for posting on the NCPTT web site.

The National Park Service's Harpers Ferry Center (HFC) and the Cultural Resources Program in the Washington Office have compiled technical information on recovery of wet objects. This information is available on the HFC and NCPTT web sites to assist museums and private citizens

in preserving their damaged objects, documents and photographs. In cooperation with the Historic Natchez Foundation and the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET), the HFC and Natchez National Historical Park provided a workshop in Mississippi on recovering water-damaged collections. Over 60 attended the workshop, which was held on September 15. It was repeated, in cooperation with SOLINET and the University of Southern Mississippi, a week later in Hattiesburg, where an additional 50 attended.

NPS incident management teams with cultural resources components have answered questions and provided technical assistance to non-NPS sites and private citizens in the impacted areas near NPS sites. For example, the NPS interdisciplinary Museum Emergency Response Team helped the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, University of Southern Mississippi, salvage an important herbarium collection. NPS is working with Louisiana Public Broadcasting to develop and broadcast a public service announcement on preservation and recovery tips for cultural resources.

In summary, the National Park Service has worked actively with our Federal, State, local government and private-sector partners to respond to the effects of Hurricane Katrina on our Nation's cultural resources and historic properties. Through our partnerships and collaborative decision-making, we are striving to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Gulf Coast.

Mr. Chairman, this completes my testimony. I would be glad to respond to any questions you or the committee may have.